(b) and (c) There is no proposal to lease forest lands to industries. However, in view of the increasing threat of encroachment upon the large quantum of degraded forest land in the country and the need to afforest it urgently so as to expand green cover, inhibit encroachment and half soil denudation and also to meet fuel and fodder needs and thereby to reduce pressure on existing natural forests and protected areas, the Government is considering to involve industry in afforestation of severely degraded areas in partnership with State Forest Development Corporations so as to augment the efforts, of Govt., N.GO's and peoples co-operatives and to increase the financial resources available for afforestation schemes of the Central and State Governments.

The Scheme under consideration will be finalised only after careful assessment of various issues involved, and ensuring protection of traditional rights and concessions being enjoyed by the rural and tribal communities. As envisioned, the scheme is also intended to benefit rural and tribal communities by increasing the availability of biomass, fuelwood and fodder, and opening up avenues for rural employment generation.

(d) and (e) There is no proposal to allot forest lands on lease to tribals, farmers etc. However, regeneration and development of degraded forests through people's participation on usufructs sharing basis is an important approach of forest management in India. It is in this context that the Government of India issued in June 1990, guidelines highlighting the need and the procedure to be adopted for the involvement of village communities and voluntary agencies in the protection and development of degraded forests. In pursuance of these guidelines, 15 States have issued orders/resolutions providing for the village communities to share usufructs from adjoining degraded forest areas that they agree to protect and develop. This programme will continue concurrently in other earmarked areas.

Low conviction rate in wild life offences

1281. SHRI O. P. KOHLI :Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that low conviction rate for wildlife offences is one of the major causes of the country's dwindling wild life resources;

(b) if so, whether Government propose to make the Wild Life Protection Act more stringent and if not, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether the Subramaniam Panel Report of the Ministry of Environment and Forests has recommended the setting up of at least one special court in every State to obviate the delay in disposing of court cases pertaining to wild life offences; and

(d) if so, the steps taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI KAMAL NATH): (a) It is a fact that there have been delays in conviction of cases related to wildlife offences, which has led to decline of wildlife in some cases.

(b) The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 was last amended in 1991 to make it more stringent and effective. At present there is no proposal to amend the Act.

(c) and (d) Yes, Sir. The setting up of Special Courts in every State will depend on the number of forest and wildlife offence cases pending disposal. We are collecting these details from State Govts. for further action.